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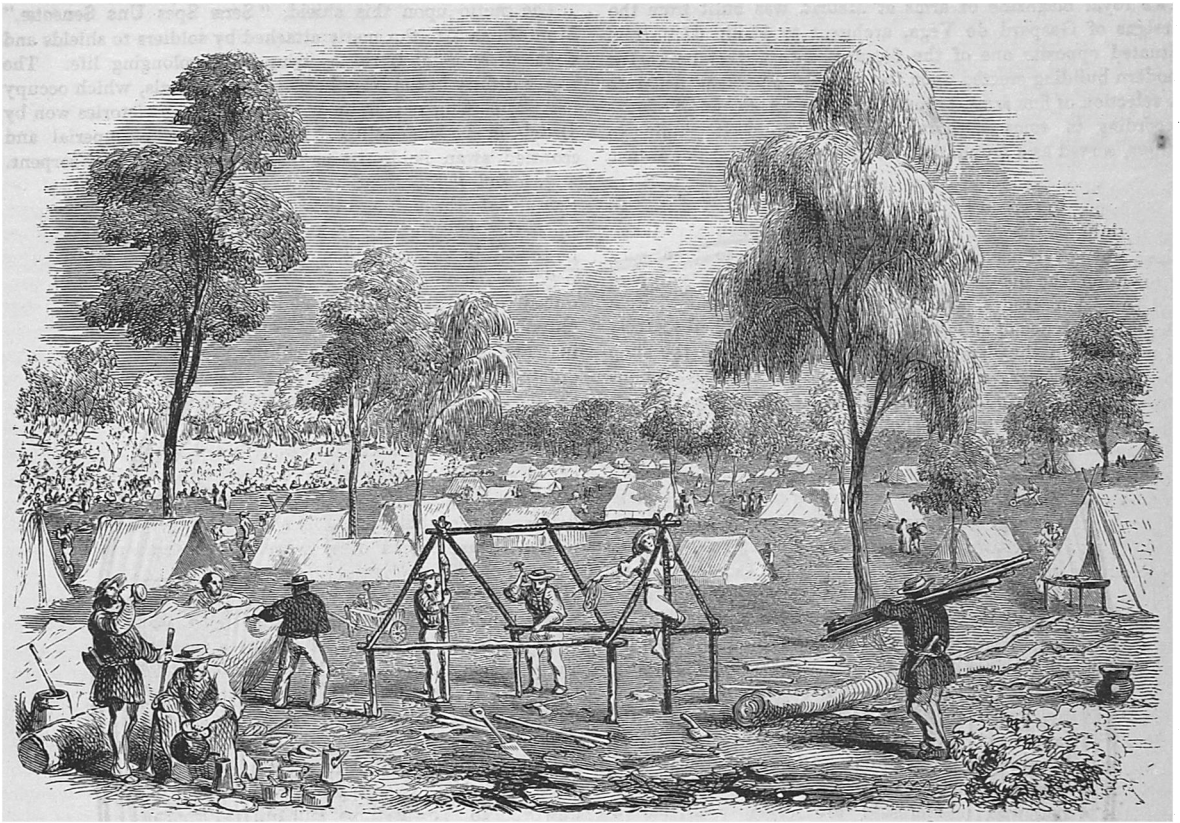
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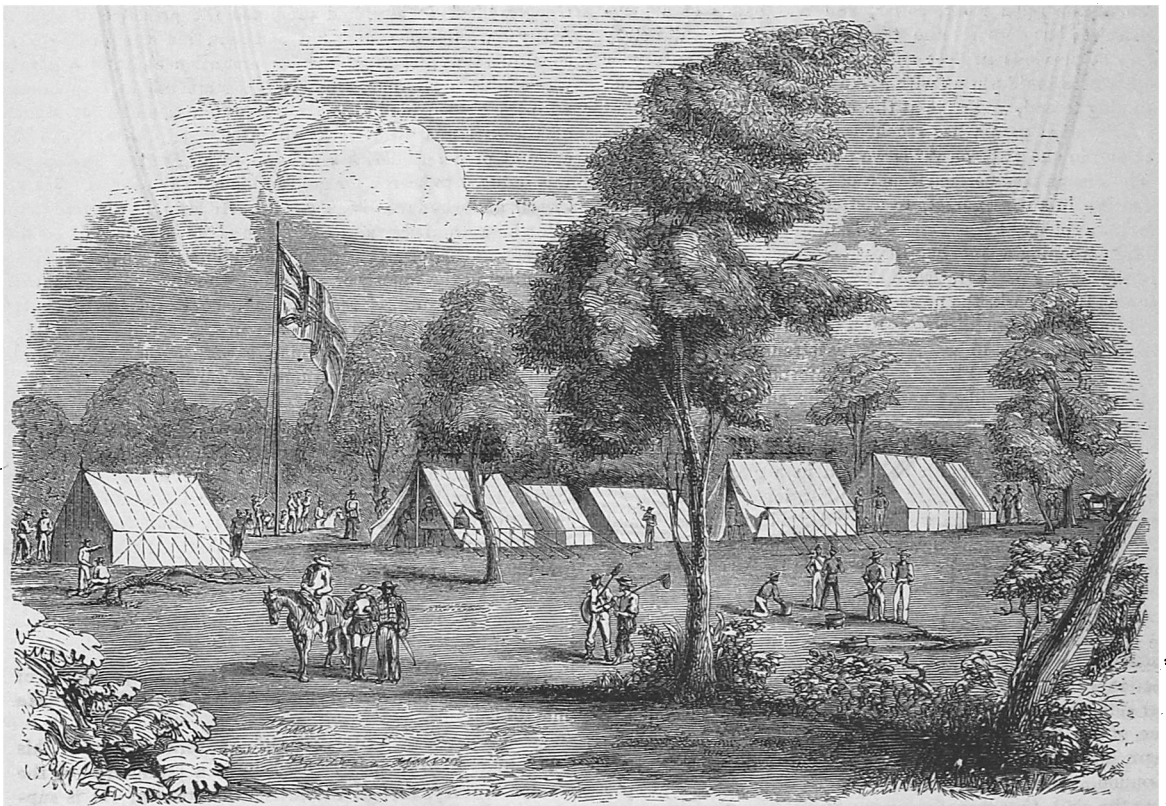
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THE AUSTRALIAN DIGGINGS.



GOLDEN POINT, MOUNT ALEXANDER.



CHIEF COMMISSIONER'S TENT AND OFFICERS' QUARTERS, MOUNT ALEXANDER.

MOUNT ALEXANDER.

THE eyes of the whole world—and especially those of the poor and needy—have been for some months past turned in the direction of the golden lands of Australia and California. Emigration to both places, therefore, and especially to the former, has been proceeding at a never-before-reached rate from the old countries of Europe. In England the exodus—for that is the modern term for emigration—is beginning to attract the attention of the rulers of the land, and to produce an effect upon trade and commerce. The demand for workers is beginning to exceed the supply; and we are glad of it. To say nothing of the strikes for higher wages which have taken place among various grades of mechanics, and the extra work thrown on the hands of all connected with the shipping and provision trades, we noticed, during a recent visit, a pleasing evidence of an advance in a direction we had scarcely expected. On the dead walls in the suburbs, on the shop shutters of chancery-closed houses in the back streets of London's city, in the windows of the bakers, next the play bill, and hung on hooks in butchers' shops like choice joints of meat, we have noticed a blue and red-printed placard, bearing this legend:—"GOOD WAGES, CONSTANT WORK, AND PROMPT ATTENTION." Now, as we do not belong to that large class of people who appear to have no other object in life than to go shuffling about crowded streets, and gazing on road-paviors, gas-pipe layers, and play-bills, we should scarcely have noticed this announcement in our ordinary perambulations. The terms of the bill, however, being somewhat unusual, we are tempted to pause a little and read it through. And then we find that this kind invitation—"Good wages, constant work, and prompt attention,"—is addressed especially to needlewomen, who are further requested to call on Messrs. So-and-so, of Houndsditch, where any number of them can be profitably employed in the preparation and completion of "youths' and gentlemen's shirts of the best description." And more than this, the needlewomen aforesaid are urgently invited to "come immediately, and bring a pattern." By the last phrase is meant a specimen of the worker's ability in the shape of the linen front, collar, and wristbands of a long-cloth shirt; but does not the term "prompt attention" betray a story of previous neglect and insolence, such as only poor sempstresses could put up with? And so, reading the bill from beginning to end, we arrive at the comfortable conclusion that the emigration mania has reached the right sort of folk at last; and in our walk onwards we picture to ourself the plain needle-woman transformed from a poor, thin, slip-slop wisp of a creature in a bare garret, to a stout happy-looking housewife in a block farm-house in Australia, with laughing children trooping about her knees.

In the spring of 1851, when all the world was at the Exhibition at Hyde-park, the news reached England that a second El Dorado had been discovered on the side of the island of Australia opposite to where the disastrous colony of Swan River was founded. People in comfortable circumstances pooh-pooh'd at the idea; and folks who should know something of geography persisted that the thing was likely enough,—till the fact was certified by the arrival of some of the actual gold, which was forthwith exhibited in a glass case at the Crystal Palace, to the wonder and admiration of thousands.

It appears to us, when we hear and read of Australia and the gold found in such abundance there, that too little attention is usually paid to the fact that the precious metals have been, at some or other period of the world's history, discovered in nearly all parts of the world. The Egyptians and the Hebrews evidently possessed it in abundance; Darius of Persia, and Cræsus of Lydia, drew tribute of gold and silver from their subjects. The ancients obtained it from Africa, just as men do now,—from the mines of Nubia and Ethiopia, probably; the indefatigable Romans crossed the Pyrenees and penetrated Spain, and braved the seas and conquered Britain, in their search for gold; the Austrians and the Russians of old times dug deep down into the mines of Sweden and Norway, and Hungary and Siberia, and blasted

rocks, and turned aside the courses of rivers, so that they might get rich all at once. In the fifteenth century, Columbus discovered the "golden Americas;" and in the sixteenth, Pizarro conquered Peru, and Cortez overcame the great Montezuma of Mexico, and the Spaniards got drunk and debased, and finally ruined themselves, with the riches found so plentifully in the New World.

And, coming nearer to our own times, we know that the Dutch, in the last century, fitted out an expedition to California for the special purpose of discovering gold. They went, and found none, though they traversed the valley of the Sacramento through and through, and looked with eager eyes upon the "everlasting rocks of quartz," since discovered to be so rich in virgin gold; and so they came back, and reported it "a barren and desolate land." Accident, we are told, produced the great Australian and Californian discoveries; but only unthinking men call those discoveries accidents. By the inscrutable will of an over-ruling Providence, it has been ordained, in many and varying periods of history, that men should vacate the crowded cities of civilisation and commerce to colonise the wilderness. It was needful that some powerful motive should impel the masses. In nearly all cases the real or supposed discovery of gold has supplied the stimulus. When the design was fulfilled, and the land was full of inhabitants, the gold insensibly shrunk away, and people employed themselves in other ways. How blinder than moles we are!

About the close of the year 1849, the gentleman to whom we are indebted for the graphic sketches we here introduce visited Australia. At that time the colonists were comparatively poor, and no hint of the gold discoveries had been given. Occasionally, bushrangers or escaped convicts brought a weighty lump of the precious metal into the towns, where they sold it cheaply and with a suspicious air; and the purchasers directly concluding that it must have been the produce of some robbery—perhaps murder—in the bush, were therefore unwilling to ask questions, and quieted their consciences with the knowledge of having made a tolerably good bargain. As long ago as 1844, Sir Roderick Murchison, in his address to the Geographical Society, had predicted the presence of gold in Australia. Science, and not accident, led the professor to conclude that the great eastern mountain chain of Australia was highly auriferous, from its geographical correspondence with the gold-fields in the Ural Mountains; and a Mr. Smith, of the Berrima iron-works in Australia, having read the account of Sir Roderick's opinion in an English newspaper, was induced to search for gold in his neighbourhood. He did search, and was partially successful. He brought the gold to the colonial authorities, and offered to make the place of its discovery known for a reward of £500; but the governor, either disbelieving the report, or fearful of encouraging a gold fever, declined to grant his request; and so it remained for Mr. Hargreaves, who visited Australia in the early part of 1851, with the prestige of Californian experience, to re-make the discovery, and get the government reward.

The first discovery of Australian gold was made at a place called Summer Hill Creek and Lewis Ponds River, small streams which run from the northern flank of the Conobalalas to the Macquarrie river. The gold was found in the accumulated sand and gravel, especially on the inside and bends of the brooks, or at the junction of the water-courses, where the one stream would be checked by the flow of the other. And in this way is nearly all the surface gold discovered in Australia and elsewhere. At first, coarse, granular gold was found, a certain proof that the parent vein was not far off—existing, probably, in the quartz veins traversing the rocks of the Conobalalas. Soon after gold was found in other localities, sometimes in the shape of tolerably large nuggets or lumps, sometimes in fine thin scales, and at others as dust, collected from the auriferous earth by repeated washings.

At the present moment, gold mining is carried on along the whole course of the Murray and Darling rivers, and their several tributaries, embracing the entire tract of country from Morton Bay to the city of Adelaide; and late accounts speak

with confidence of gold having been found also in New Zealand and Van Dieman's Land.

Mount Alexander and its neighbourhood appears to have been the earliest and, upon the whole, the most satisfactory of the gold diggings. It is situated within about forty miles from Melbourne and Geelong. The whole district consists of quartz-bearing rocks, and is highly auriferous. Now, although the quartz is, doubtless, the native matrix of the gold, we have not heard of any actual veins of the precious metal having been discovered. It is generally found lying loose in the sand and gravel, and at others buried deep in the clay which forms the substratum of the soil. Mr. Gibbon, writing to the *Melbourne Argus*, says, that gold is usually found imbedded in the blue clay near the surface on the brow of the hill; but that it is sometimes necessary to dig twenty feet before arriving at it. And Mr. Latrobe, governor of the colony of Victoria, describes the borings as carried through—

1. Red ferruginous earth and gravel.
2. Streaked, yellowish, and red clay.
3. Quartz gravels of moderate size.
4. Large quartz pebbles and boulders, masses of ironstone set in very compact clay, hard to work.
5. Blue and white clay, in which are small portions of gold.
6. Pipe clay, in which gold is almost certain to be found.

Now, as this rich pipe clay occasionally lies thirty feet below the surface, the labour required to reach it will easily be comprehended—fitted, indeed, for railway excavators, brick-makers, well-borers, agricultural labourers, and for few else!

In the first of our engravings, we have a view of the gold field at Golden Point, Mount Alexander. Writing on the spot, the gentleman, who has furnished us with the drawings, which were made at the close of 1852, says, "It is a busy scene indeed. In the distance is the hill called Golden Point, so famed in the early history of Mount Alexander. Crowds of diggers [not very well defined in the engraving] are employed at this spot. Some are digging, some are wheeling barrows filled with the auriferous earth; while others—and those a very large number—are carrying the earth on their backs to the stream, which is concealed by the trees on its banks. Here the soil is washed and cradled, and whatever gold it possesses carefully extracted. In the foreground, some diggers, just arrived, are engaged in fixing their tents."

"Many of the tents are occupied as stores and provision shops, and similar establishments are scattered throughout the various diggings. From the proprietors of these stores supplies of every kind can be purchased—of course, with an advance—at Melbourne prices. Nevertheless, the erection of these stores are a great convenience to the diggers; for were it not for the foresight and business arrangements of the store-keepers, much privation would, doubtless, have been experienced. The additional charges are, generally speaking, moderate enough, except in cases of great scarcity; and even then it is only some few articles which are charged at exorbitantly high prices. In the depth of the last winter, it was feared that many of the stores would be closed from the difficulty of conveying heavy provisions over the bad roads."

Since the above was written, however, the roads to Mount Alexander have, we understand, been considerably improved. In the locality of Golden Point large quantities of gold have been found. So long as water remains in the creek gold rewards the searchers, but when the summer heats dry up the supply, then the digger's labour is almost thrown away. The gold here is generally found in dust and scales, but occasionally large nuggets are discovered, which well reward the lucky finder. It was in this neighbourhood that a twenty pound weight nugget was found in 1852. The Prince of Nuggets, however,—that picked up by Dr. Ker in 1851, which weighed upwards of a hundred weight—was found at what are now the Ballarat Diggings. It is described as a block of highly auriferous quartz, found lying among a lot of other loose blocks, evidently derived from a broad quartz vein running up the hill behind the river. "Such a mass," says Professor Forbes, in describing the geology of Australia, "could hardly be transported far from its original site by any current of water."

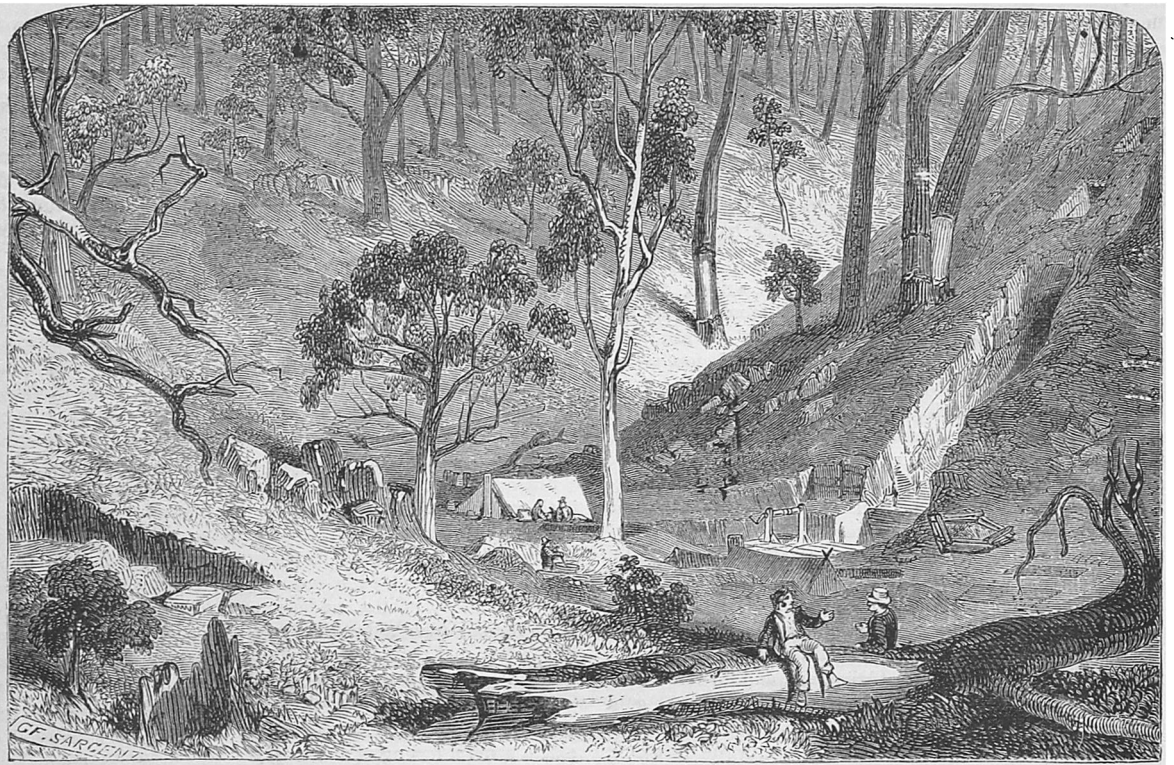
Our object being rather to give an idea of the present appearance of the "diggings" than to attempt anything like a continuous narrative of the gold discovery,—an object not yet accomplished, by the way, in any one of the published accounts,—we proceed to "follow our leader," the artist.

The next scene is a perfect contrast to the former one, and might be taken, without any very violent stretch of the imagination, for part of the experimental camp at Woolwich or Windsor, where British soldiers play at sieges, and so forth, every now and then. There is an air of quiet about it which speaks pretty distinctly of official residence, even in the diggings; and except for two or three days of the month, this serene air is tolerably well preserved. The tent to the left is the license office—a most important one, therefore, to intending gold diggers. The next large tent on the other side of the flag-staff is used as a depository for gold while waiting for the escort; and it, also, is as well known to the miners from all quarters as the Bank of England is to the London merchant. Other tents are used as sleeping-places, &c.

Since the sketch was taken, many changes have occurred, both in the numbers of persons in the colony—every day bringing its ship-load or two—and in the official management of the police of the gold districts. Many wooden buildings have since been erected in various parts of the diggings for the accommodation of the soldiery and officials, and a much more regular plan of business has been adopted. More than this, additional police are distributed over the diggings, and a much improved state of morality exists. When our artist was here, there were few police, and even the greater part of them were stationed at the chief commissioner's quarters; and a general feeling of insecurity was the inevitable result. Robberies, riots, and murders were of common occurrence, and scenes of the most abominable description were continually taking place. All that, however, belongs to the past history of the gold-seekers. At this moment life and property may be considered almost as safe as in an English village or an American backwood. The home government having taken energetic measures in the appointment of additional magistrates, and in the enrolment of large bodies of pensionary police at salaries good enough to secure their best services even in the diggings, the aspect of affairs have so far changed for the better, that "the diggers proceed about their work, and go in and out of their tents and huts, with a feeling of as much security as in a well-ordered town."

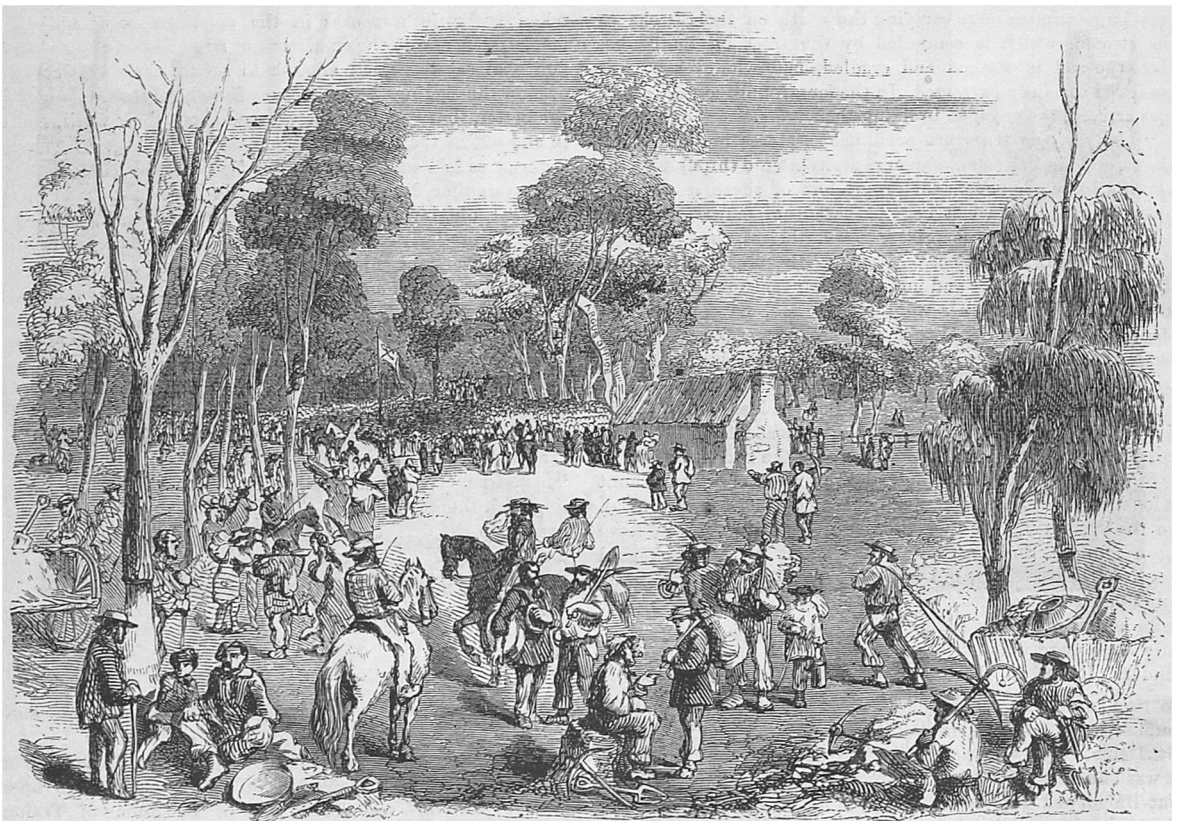
By this time, likewise, decent roads have been made in the different diggings, and society, even there, is beginning to assume an orderly and respectable aspect. "Our only wants," says a successful miner, writing home to his mother and sisters, "are wives and children. Why don't you come out?"

By the winter of 1852, the number of diggers in Australia had increased so considerably as to produce some alarm in the minds of the colonial government; and it was rashly proposed to impose an export duty on gold, and to double the license fee. No sooner, however, had the news come to the ears of the miners—for state secrets will leak out, even from the best regulated councils—than they took alarm, and a "monster meeting" was called for the purpose of remonstrating with the government. The great interest attached by all parties to the demonstration induced our artist to attend. It took place at Mount Alexander on the 15th of December last, and these results were consequent on it. The first, and all-important one, was the withdrawal of the proposed government measure; and the last, the production of the graphic sketch before us. Here we get a glimpse of the sort of folks comprised in that various and motley congregation of men called "diggers." Settlers, sailors, tradesmen, even the "Manilla man" and his boy, and the "old hand," sitting on the stump in the foreground of the picture, are each bold types of their class. Perhaps in no other spot in her Majesty's dominions could such a variously-dressed assembly be gathered together—a sort of open-air masquerade, in which the characters were costumed in anything but ball-room style. Of the meeting itself it is sufficient to say, that the object of the numerous speakers was fully attained—the government



WHIRLEY'S GULLEY, THE SPOT WHERE THE GOLD WAS FIRST DISCOVERED; FOREST CREEK RANGES, MOUNT ALEXANDER.

was impressed with their earnestness, the license fee was *not* doubled; and the thousands of diggers departed in peace. for it was here that the gold on Mount Alexander was first discovered. At this moment there are upwards of 60,000



GREAT MEETING OF GOLD DIGGERS AT MOUNT ALEXANDER, DEC. 15, 1852.

Whirley's Gully, the other scene depicted by the artist, is interesting, both in itself and on account of its associations, persons at this spot; and, by all accounts, there is no falling off in the amount of gold.